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imagery analysis report

Soviet Airborne Regiments in Eastern Theater Joint Forces Exercise March 1979 (S)

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SOVIET AIRBORNE REGIMENTS IN EASTERN THEATER JOINT FORCES EXERCISE, MARCH 1979 (S)

INTRODUCTION

1. (TSR) At least two BMD (armored personnel carrier: Figure 1)-equipped airborne regiments were deployed to the Transbaikal Military District (MD) in March 1979 to participate in a large-scale Soviet joint forces exercise conducted in the Eastern Theater. This was the first time since 1969 that airborne units had operated in the Eastern USSR.

2. [] Imagery of late March indicated that two airborne regiments were deployed to the Transbaikal MD—one regiment to Domna Airfield and the other to Olovyannaya Airfield (Figure 2). A possible airborne unit command and control element was also observed at Chita Airfield Northwest.

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[] No activity or equipment associated with airborne troops was, however, observed in the exercise area on imagery of []

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DESCRIPTION

Domna Airfield

3. (TSR) When observed on imagery of [] a BMD-equipped airborne regiment (Figure 3) was at the east end of Domna Airfield (BE []). Approximately 115 BMDs, at least ten cargo pallets, six possible artillery pieces, five probable GAZ-66 rocket launchers, and 26 vehicles/pieces of equipment were parked in formation parallel to a sod taxiway extension. A tent bivouac area containing 14 large 40-man tents, five medium 18-man tents, and 70 small 10- to 12-man tents had been set up in the southeast area of the airfield complex (Figure 4). Seven IL-76 CANDID aircraft were parked on a parallel taxiway. None of this equipment had been present on []

4. (TSR) On [] the day before the planned paradrop, no significant change was observed in the equipment in the regiment at Domna. Equipment was parked in approximately the same positions, and no CANDIDs were at the airfield. On [] one day after the planned paradrop, the numbers and types of equipment in the parking area remained unchanged, but some activity was observed. This activity included the palletizing of materials on at

least 12 cargo pallets. At the tent bivouac area, all but 12 large tents had been removed. Twenty CANDID aircraft were parked on the south parallel taxiway.

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Olovyannaya Airfield

5. (TSR) Airborne activity was observed for the first time at Olovyannaya Airfield []. A bivouac area containing two large tents, three medium tents, and 28 small tents was near the northeast end of a parallel sod taxiway. Elements of a BMD-equipped airborne regiment were being loaded onto CANDID aircraft (Figure 5). Neither airborne equipment nor CANDIDs had been observed on the last previous coverage of []

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6. (TSR) Of the 43 CANDIDs at the airfield on [] 19 were parked wing-to-wing near the airborne regiment bivouac, and 18 were parked in a line on the paved taxiway. The rear cargo doors of six CANDIDs were open, and two or three BMDs were at the rear of each of these aircraft ready to be unloaded. Although only 13 BMDs were observed in the open, a clear impression of the parking pattern still visible in the bivouac area indicated that a full regiment had been parked there. A large group of personnel were on benches to the rear of the 19 CANDIDs nearest the bivouac area.

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7. (TSR) On [] two days following the planned paradrop, the airborne regiment—which included at least 80 BMDs, 22 GAZ-66 trucks, 12 probable artillery pieces, and approximately 65 unidentified vehicles/pieces of equipment—was parked in disorderly rows in or near the bivouac area. Several parachutes had been laid out on the ground to dry, and 23 CANDIDs were parked near the airborne regiment (Figure 6).

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Chita Airfield Northwest

8. (TSR) An airborne-related bivouac area (Figure 7) was observed on [] at Chita Airfield Northwest [] approximately 15 nautical miles northeast of Domna. The bivouac

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FIGURE 1. BMD ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIER. DoD, Foreign Technology Division; ground photo, attachment to IR 6 901 1085 77(CONFIDENTIAL)

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area contained 31 large tents, 14 medium tents, and eight small tents. Approximately 110 vehicles/pieces of equipment were parked in an adjacent secured area. This equipment included at least five BMDs, six possible GAZ-66 rocket launchers, six possible ZPU-23 antiaircraft guns, at least 14 probable pallet carrier trucks, and several GAZ-66 cargo trucks. This bivouac area may have been either a command and control element for the airborne units at Domna and Olovyanaya or the headquarters element of a third airborne regiment. No subsequent imagery of the bivouac area at Chita was acquired until [] at which time all of the tents and equipment had been removed.

Postexercise Activity

9. (TSR) The airborne regiments were departing both Domna and Olovyanaya airfields when observed on imagery of [] All of the airborne equipment and CANDID aircraft had departed the airfields by []

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10. (TSR) At Domna Airfield, on [] approximately half of the equipment of the regiment had been removed from the parking area and loaded onto railcars at a rail siding just east of the airfield (Figure 8). Twelve large tents remained in the tent bivouac area, and ten CANDID aircraft

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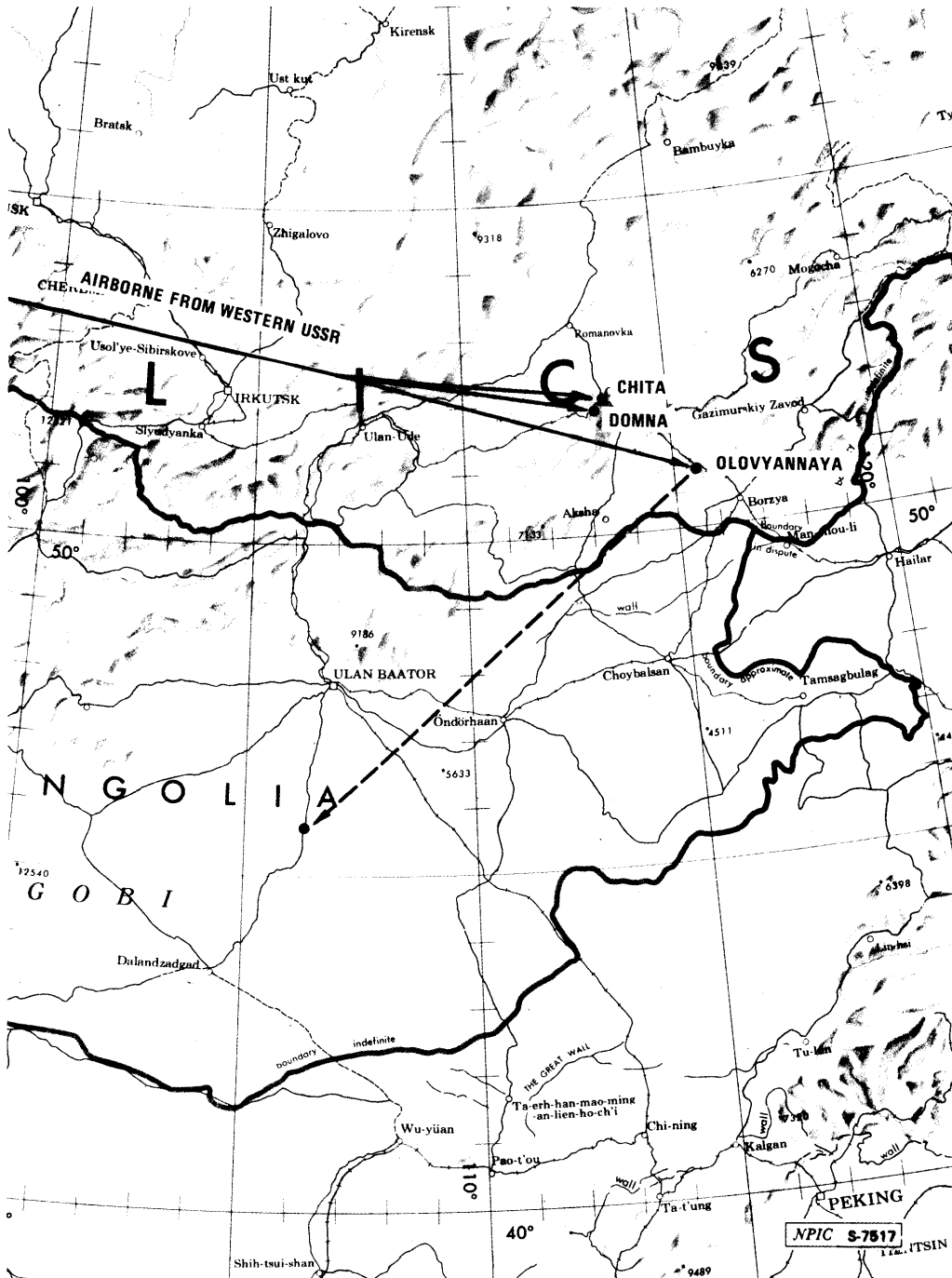


FIGURE 2. AIRBORNE REGIMENTS DEPLOYED TO TRANSBAIKAL MD, USSR

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were parked at the airfield. On the same day, at Olovyannaya Airfield, 43 BMDs were in convoy formation moving west past 20 parked CANDIDs and away from the airfield (Figure 9). Twenty more BMDs appeared to be preparing to join the convoy. The local training areas and a rail siding are in the direction that the convoy was moving. The rear cargo doors were open on seven of the parked CANDIDs, and large numbers of personnel were near the aircraft.

SUMMARY

11. (TSR) Photographic evidence confirms that

at least two BMD-equipped airborne regiments were deployed to the Transbaikalian MD during the period [REDACTED] [REDACTED] however, it appears that only one of the regiments actually participated in the exercise and that this participation was limited. The regiment at Domna apparently did not leave the airfield during the exercise period. The regiment at Olovyannaya was loaded onto CANDID aircraft and was probably flown to the exercise area near Mandalgovi, Mongolia. This regiment had returned to the airfield within two days after the planned paratroop; thus, its participation in the exercise at Mandalgovi could not have been extensive.

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REFERENCE

1. NSA. 3/00/13967/79 Spot Report, *Soviet General Staff Conducts Major Exercise in the Eastern Theater, March 1979 (TSC)*, 102248Z Apr 79 (TOP SECRET [REDACTED])

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(S) Comments and queries regarding this report are welcome. They may be directed to [REDACTED] Warsaw.
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